

When TV Was New

Earning Their Miles

IN 1952, at the New Amsterdam Theatre in New York City, my husband, Donald, and I had been chosen as contestants on the blockbuster CBS TV show The Big Payoff.

I was a legal secretary in New York. Donald, who had just started his teaching career in West Hempstead, had spent time in the Navy aboard LSTs in the South Pacific during World War II, and he wanted to travel more. The perfect solution was to win the payoff.

Donald answered four questions correctly, identifying a popular song, the ship in Jack London's The Sea Wolf, a household tool and an English quotation.

For this, he won a 2-week, all-expenses-paid trip to Sweden, a mink coat and many other prizes. Not to be outdone, I did my part by winning a beautiful Kaiser Manhattan luxury automobile!

The trip to Sweden was the beginning of our travels with our two daughters over the coming years to many European countries and other faraway places.

—Gloria Cosgrove, Sarasota, Florida

Strolling to Stardom

TWO OF MY FRIENDS and I were wearing identical dresses of fuchsia cotton with a pattern of small white flowers as we strolled down the promenade at the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island ("Thirty-Nine Is the Time, San Francisco Is the Place").

At the back of a huge building, a man near a small door with a microphone in his hand beckoned to us. He asked if any of us had a talent. My friends Betty Pomeroy and Maybelle Hamilton

immediately pointed to me and said, “Oh, yes, she sings.”

The man led us into a room almost devoid of anything except wires and microphones and said, “Here’s the mike, Lucille. Sing.” I energetically burst into Jim Doesn’t Ever Bring Me Pretty Flowers, a popular song.

After a few lines, we girls were surprised when what we thought was a long wall parted; it was actually curtains. A whole sea of people were staring at us and clapping. The man explained that we were part of a TV demonstration in which the audience had watched us on a television tube.

We felt like celebrities a week or two, but at our age, there were many new things being offered. Betty and I are still friends but we’ve lost track of Maybelle, so we hope she sees this.

—Lucille Narron, Pittsburg, California

Shocked into Snuggling

DURING MY junior high school days, in the mid-1950s, we would have “shock parties” in Shreveport, Louisiana.

Boys and girls would gather at someone’s house, always with parents present, to watch the horror movie of the week on the local TV station’s Shock Theatre. We’d eat popcorn and drink Cokes, and the girls would shriek and clutch their boyfriends during the scary parts (sometimes not really so scary).

After the movie, the boys would go home and the girls would have a slumber party. We’d experiment with makeup and hairstyles, practice walking on high heels and, of course, giggle about the boys.

—Martha Koelemay, Pine Ridge, Arkansas